

How To Use Engagement To Build Strong Customer Relationships

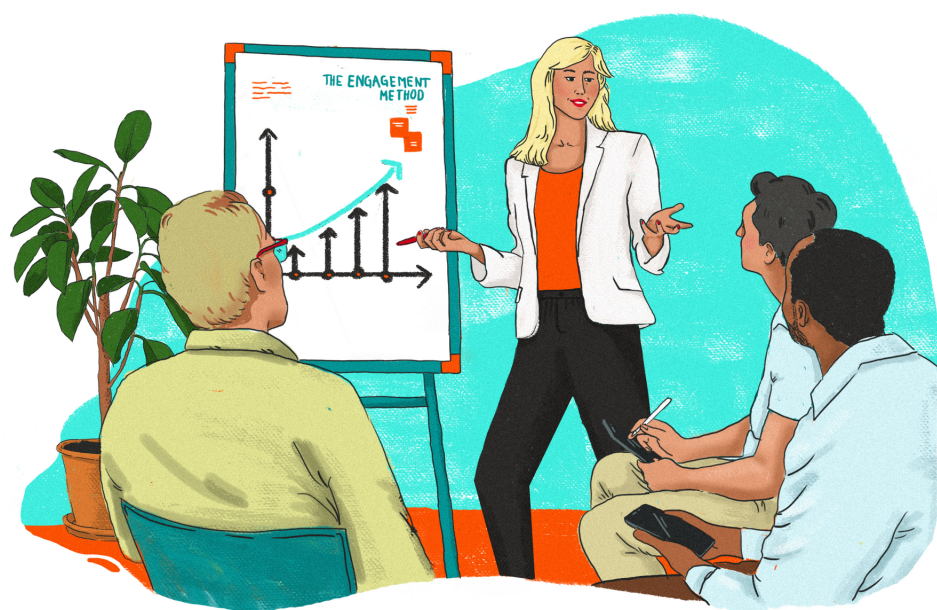
The Engagement Method™

Many businesses interact with customers in a cold 'transactional' manner across their touchpoints.

Lacking the human touch of Emotional Intelligence, it's more about taking than giving.

Especially when it comes to gathering feedback and research data.

It's our hobby-horse for sure! And in this Tip-Sheet, we show how your innovation, marketing, and insights activities can all benefit from a warm & friendly approach using **The Engagement Method™**.



Customers want to be part of a community.

They want to share their stories, opinions, and feelings.

It's up to us to provide a safe, trusting environment so they can enjoy the experience, making them feel valued, and that their opinion matters.

Customers who feel valued will share what motivated them to buy. They'll let you know how it met their needs, as well as what annoys them.

This is gold when it comes to generating ideas to feed innovation. Along with communicating it via your marketing content.

It's also the foundation of creating new ideas for helping people do the tasks they want to with your product. You may know this as the 'Jobs-To-Be-Done' philosophy.



As Theodore Levitt, writing on the JTBD Framework famously said, "People do not want a quarter-inch drill, they want a quarter-inch hole."

Build the relationship with engagement.

We said business is often a transactional process. Yet the reason for the transaction is also underpinned by emotional drivers.

It's like building any personal relationship. If you take the trouble to understand their motivators it will give you a closer connection.

The more someone sees that you understand them, the more they will trust you.

Customers must feel respected and safe. Billy Joel called it "*A Matter of Trust*". Where people perceive they can share their feelings and opinions with you, without opening the floodgates to sophisticated, social media retargeting, or just plain old-school, hard-sell spam. The issue didn't start with Facebook!

It takes commitment. You can't simply have a chat one day and expect them to love you forever.

Relationship-building involves constantly staying in tune with their changing needs and values, and acknowledging them as real people. Especially now in pandemic stress.

What's the biggest challenge when talking to your VIP customers?

It's often the type of feedback questions. If you ask someone what you could do better, they are likely to provide *"just the same, but with more"* type responses. And that's not especially helpful.

Although your survey data is useful in giving you a picture of what happened in the past, it can't tell you what the future holds.

But when you identify their perceptions, values, attitudes, and motivators, you can use those insights in light of what you do, and provide services that better serve those needs.

Understanding your customers' perceptions also gives you an opportunity to reinforce the positive and change the negative based on your strategy. Also, by understanding values and motivators, you can provide products that enhance that experience.

We've created a Power-Chat Topic-Builder as a great resource for developing your own engaging discussion topics.

Building a relationship with customers isn't complicated, but it does require you to consider them as real.

Think of research as people, not stats.

It's all too easy for a marketer to be immersed in data, if not overwhelmed, by an endless stream of metrics, KPIs, Net Promoter Scores, Satisfaction etc even though these are understandably essential for management to run the business.

But it can mean being disconnected from the source of all the numbers - real, flesh & blood people who are unique individuals, with their own stories and experiences with the brands in their life.

"The quality of insights depends on the level of engagement."

If they don't feel part of the process, it falls flat. You might get some information, but the end-value depends on their commitment to the process.

Once you engage them in the process, make it about them, then the responses change. They're no longer ticking boxes just to get the process finished - instead, they feel part of your team.

Gathering insights shouldn't be siloed off, to be cold and boring. It must be an extension of your marketing values.

Demonstrate how you respect people's opinions, and they'll reward you with insights that go well beyond the ticking of a box.

Making the process engaging opens the opportunity to unearth emotional triggers. Especially when you need that critical feedback to make better decisions, and build your customer relationships.

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“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.” – Peter Drucker

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It starts at the top.

The invitation to participate in a survey or discussion group could be a video from the owner, manager or whoever is the face of the business as a powerful, personal message.

Yes, it's a valuable tool for communicating your purpose for undertaking the exercise. But it also demonstrates a sense of purpose for your customers. It tells them why they should participate WIIFM (What's In It For Me)!

Write questions like a friend, not a data scientist.

After years of conditioning, it's natural for a marketer to feel that a questionnaire has to be written in formal, academic language to avoid bias.

Of course, you do have to be very careful not writing ambiguous or confusing questions. Or using your industry's jargon, making your communication understandable only to your team. This is why testing your questions with outsiders can help.

On the other hand, you don't have to be overly matey either - avoid try-hard slang.

Plain and simple language is the mantra – think Twitter with the disciplines of word economy and one thought at a time.

Then keep the activity engaging and entertaining. For instance, you can use images and GIFs to dress questions - just be careful not to 'lead' the response to a particular answer. You can even include a fun question or topic about your category.

Build Trust.

It's one of the most important elements of any business. And goes for both your team and customers. Without it, you're playing a short-term game.

When gathering any form of insights, there are 3 Key Rules for a marketer to ensure a solid foundation of trust...

1. In a survey, tell participants their answers will be merged with everyone else's data, and they won't be personally identified in the analysis.

In an online forum, this can be managed by using first names or nicknames only, or even anonymous codenames.

2. Make it clear that the information won't be shared with any third parties for sales purposes. People are well aware that databases are often on-sold, exposing to them to spam. And that includes strictly avoiding the temptation to upsell a customer based on a question response.

3. Be transparent, and tell them the name of the business conducting the study. This used to be a no-no to avoid bias. But people always try to guess anyway, and any brand-comparison questions will narrow the field considerably.

Don't forget the End-Game.

Saying thanks is a given, but for continued participation in the future – and ongoing customer loyalty – there's another step.

Known as 'Shareback', this could be a video, with a short summary of your findings, along with the improvements you're making as a direct result of their input.

Of course, you won't be sharing commercially sensitive information. But your customers will get a buzz and tell others (turning into influencers themselves), about how they helped drive the changes.

"Giving customers a seat at the boardroom table."

Compared to the world of AI and chatbots, where humans are redundant, it's been awesome in our experience, to have people give genuine thanks for being able to express their opinions directly to a decision-maker.

Every touch-point in your marketing must be engaging and relatable. Don't let your market research be the exception!

The Engagement Method™ is a process used within the Thriveable Pathway©.

You can find out more by heading to thriveablebiz.com

About The Authors



Eriks Celmins brings a wealth of global experience in turning customer insights into winning innovation.

He runs both in-depth quantitative & qualitative research, using **The Engagement Method™**. Helping businesses gather actionable insights and build customer relationships.

Eriks is a full Member of The Research Society (formerly Australian Market & Social Research Society).

"I'm always open to exploring creative solutions to research challenges. Reach out to me personally if you want to hash out some ideas, or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#)."



Judy Celmins is a born marketer, with a passion for understanding why people buy.

So you can surprise & delight customers with innovation.

"I love taking what other people see as obstacles, and finding creative solutions".

You can connect with Judy on [LinkedIn](#)

